

At Haverhill to
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Mr. PARKER's Oration.



AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT CASTINE,

JULY 4, 1796,

AT THE CELEBRATION

OF THE

Twentieth Anniversary

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

By ISAAC PARKER, ESQUIRE.

*Chief Justice
of Massachusetts*



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1796.

SIR,

THE Artillery Company of Castine have appointed us a Committee to wait on you, and request a copy of the address, delivered by you yesterday, for the press.

RICHARD HUNEWELL,
in behalf of the Committee.

ISAAC PARKER, Esq.

July 5, 1796.

GENTLEMEN,

IT may be considered presumptuous to submit to the public eye, a performance which I had little more than twenty-four hours to prepare; but as I had rather risk my reputation as a writer, than refuse compliance with a request so politely urged, I deliver it into your hands, believing that if it is ever read, it will be read with more candour than criticism.

I am respectfully yours,

ISAAC PARKER.

The GENTLEMEN of the COMMITTEE,



AN
ORATION.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

HAVING assembled to commemorate the day which gave birth to the independence of our happy country, it may be well to retrace some of the causes which led to that glorious event, and to awaken feelings, which, though the lapse of twenty years may have in some degree enfeebled, can never be obliterated from our minds.

The American states, prior to the fourth day of July, 1776, were in a state of vassallage to Great-Britain, were subject to her laws and government, and in fact were her colonies, from which she expected *obedience*, without even the return of protection.

While in infancy, and hardly strong enough to provide for, and defend themselves, they met with a semblance of affection from the parent country, and received that aid and assistance which promoted their growth, and hastened their maturity.

Attachment

Attachment to ancient friends, and respect for the government from which they sprang, led the citizens of America to believe that affection and disinterested kindness produced this attention ; but the subsequent conduct of Great-Britain evinced the fallacy of the supposition, and shewed that the aggrandizement of the kingdom was the most operative cause of her apparently parental solicitude.

As the West-Indian planter cherishes the slave, from whose labour he looks for an accumulation of his wealth, so did Great-Britain nurture her American colonies, looking forward to the plentiful harvest she expected ere long to enjoy.

As soon as their unexampled increase of wealth and population warranted the attempt, her motives became palpable : Taxes were demanded without regard to the abilities of the people ; and the pretended principles of her constitution were violated, to fill ministerial coffers with American wealth.

The principle adopted by the parliament of Great-Britain, that they could tax the colonies to any extent, without admitting them to a share in the government, was so monstrous in its nature and destructive in its consequences, that the spirit of resistance was at once enflamed, and the cry for independence became universal.

Few that witnessed the feeble state of this country, at that eventful period, could have predicted so glorious an issue to the virtuous struggles

struggles which were then made in resistance against tyrannic encroachment. Disordered in our governments—destitute of the means of war,—scattered over an extensive continent, and accustomed only to the peaceful implements of husbandry—who could have ventured to say, that the disciplined veterans of Europe, supported by an exhaustless treasury, and impelled by wounded pride and resentment, would have left the field, and yielded the point of contest. “But the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” The just pursuit of America was better to her than a host.

Fighting for liberty, the inalienable right of man, and resisting oppression, Heaven smiled upon her exertions, and she was crowned with success.

The termination of the contest seemed to promise the most unbounded prosperity to our country: But experience proved that much was yet to be done, before our liberties would be placed upon a permanent foundation.

The four years immediately succeeding peace were clouded with domestic dissention; our commerce was annihilated; agriculture was without a spring; and the general torpidity throughout America was afflictive to the friends, and joyous to the enemies, of our revolution.

The latter tauntingly asked, What is your boasted independence? It has destroyed your commerce; it has darkened your prospects; you have the *name* of liberty, but for the *name alone* you have sacrificed the substantial interests of

of your country. We could only reply, that we hoped for better things, and we waited for some unknown interference to quicken us again into activity and life.

In the natural body, sluggishness and inactivity frequently succeed violence of exertion; and in the body politic, convulsive agitations are commonly followed by supineness and lethargy.

Whilst invaded by an enemy, and menaced with servitude, a sense of common danger was sufficient to preserve union, and the magnitude of our object ensured vigilance. But when danger was removed, carelessness succeeded, and our country sunk into an indifference which threatened fulfilment to the predictions of our enemies.

The several states, consulting their individual interests, neglected the happiness of the whole: Divided councils, distracted measures, partial pursuits, and local politics, were discoverable in all their proceedings.

Had another period of four years been marked with the same disgraceful colours, we may say with confidence, that we should have courted the protection of some foreign power, and should have remembered this now glorious anniversary with ignominy and reproach. But Heaven had not forsaken us; the disasters of the day taught the necessity of union, and evinced the impossibility of happiness without a national government. This mighty continent felt the disease, and was eager to procure a remedy.

From

From this state of things sprang the happy form of government which is now in operation, and which is acknowledged, by Europe as well as America, to be the most perfect republican system, which the ingenuity of man has yet devised.

It would be tedious, as well as unnecessary, to develop the various parts of this beautiful machine. Suffice it to say, that the people are the source of all the power it conveys; and that its object, the happiness of the people, is most effectually secured.

I cannot, however, omit to mention the most prominent excellence it contains, I mean the article by which, whenever experience proves a defect, or change of circumstance suggests an alteration, it may be ameliorated without violence, and rendered more and more perfect, without disturbing the public tranquillity. Here is a sure guard against that turbulence which always attends an alteration of government in other countries.

In Europe, the people must continue under oppression, or perhaps be destroyed in attempts to remove it: But in America, alterations have taken place, and, if necessary, will hereafter be made, not only without bloodshed, but without even convulsing the public mind.

Like the majestic river, which imperceptibly seeks a new channel, and silently changes its course, our federal government may assume new features, and discover new beauties, whenever the people require it, without any disturbance

to the general movements of the machine. Here is a check to the licentious spirit of innovation, far more effectual than the sanguinary codes of tyrants. Here is a barrier against sedition and factious machinations, more solid than the prisons of Germany, or the Bastille of France.

If ever a deluded part of the community should rise in opposition to the laws, the great body of the people will be sure to repress them, and to preserve inviolate this grand palladium of national liberty and happiness.

We, fellow-citizens, have peculiar reasons for admiring this magnificent structure, for it is principally modelled after the constitution of our Commonwealth, under which we have enjoyed, and, I trust, shall continue to enjoy, so many rich and invaluable blessings.

The uninterrupted, the unprecedented growth of America, since the operation of our federal government ; her increased population ; her immense commerce ; her successful agriculture ; her reputation abroad ; her felicity at home, speak, in terms incontrovertible, the excellence of that government ; and ~~there~~, beyond contradiction, its unexampled merit.

Let us then strive to preserve it in its purity ; let us yield our strength to prop it, when in danger ; let us furnish to the world a single instance, that a government made by the people *will* promote their happiness, and *will* endure.

America was first to make the experiment ; the French nation have gloriously followed our steps ;

steps ; and every American will join me, sincerely, in prayer, that, while liberty and good government are their objects, their exertions may be crowned with complete success.

In revolving this important and delightful subject, it is impossible to shut out from the mind, the recollection of those heroes and statesmen, who were principally instrumental in our happy revolution.

It is unnecessary to particularize.

Each one of this assembly can recal the names of those distinguished patriots, to whose exertions, under Heaven, we are indebted for our existence as a nation.

May the American name never be sullied with the stigma of ingratitude ; but may the memory of departed heroes be as immortal as the actions which dignify their names.

Our Commonwealth can boast of many who were high in the list of honour ; and the Union is still blessed with the services of the man who led our armies to victory, and our country to independence. I can add nothing to enhance your ideas of ~~this~~ exalted character, beyond what his actions have already established in your minds. When he was crowned with success, and in full possession of the hearts, as well as the persons of his soldiers, those, who understood human nature, predicted that he would profit by his popularity to secure to himself the government of his country ; but we saw him lay his laurels at the feet of the people, for whom they were gathered, and cheerfully reassume the peaceful occupations of domestic life. When

When called, by the unanimous voice of his country, to preside in her councils, those who know the narrow limits of human capacity, and that it is not often given to the same man to shine in different spheres, insinuated, that he would lose in the cabinet the fame he had acquired in the field ; and that a life, which had commenced with brilliancy, would probably end in obscurity. But we have seen him, in times of danger to our country, preserve the helm of government with unshaken hand, and conduct us through rocks and quicksands with unequalled dexterity.

And is the esteem of his fellow-citizens commensurate to his virtues ? Yes ; he lives in the heart of every *real friend* to his country, and will be handed down to distant generations, as the greatest, the best of men. Painful is it to say, that even this character, as perfect as humanity can bear, has been the mark of slander and unmerited reproach. The envenomed dart has been aimed at his godlike breast ; but meeting with the impregnable barrier of his virtues, has recoiled upon the archers, and covered them with confusion and disgrace.

It may not be improper briefly to state a few of the measures, which will be essential to prolong the liberties we have so happily acquired. *Virtue* is the rock upon which republican governments must be built, or they will soon perish.

The people being the source of all power, if *they* are corrupt, every authority which flows from

from them will be contaminated. Maintain, then, the virtue of the people; and to this end, spread the means of education; cultivate the minds of your youth; give them ability to understand their government, and they will be always ready to support it.

In a community, of which the members are well informed, virtue will reside; and where virtue dwells, liberty will be sure to remain.

Is there danger of losing our liberties, and again becoming subject to tyrannic sway? Yes. If the youth are neglected, their morals will become corrupt, they will be unable to discern when their liberty is invaded, and they will barter their privileges to the ambitious and intriguing. Can our liberties last forever? Yes. Check the influence of vice, inculcate the seeds of virtue, circulate knowledge extensively. You will then find no domestic villain hardy enough to attempt your slavery; no foreign tyrant able to reduce you to subjection. Attend, also, to your militia establishments. It was these, (inferior as they then were), which made resistance to Great-Britain in the least degree justifiable, and furnished the remotest probability of success. Happy am I to say, that in this young country a military ambition begins to prevail; and I am still happier to predict, that a few years will add much to the spirit. From those gentlemen who are raised by their fellow citizens to places of command, peculiar exertions are required: And I trust their zeal will not be disproportionate to the confidence reposed in them.

From

From you, gentlemen, who are the first founders of a company which will hereafter be as respectable for its numbers as it is now for the character of its members, we expect such attention to military discipline and order, as will lay a solid foundation for the future eminence of your company. It is not the splendor of parade, or the frolic of the day, which originated your institution : I trust you had a view to its usefulness in the protection of your country. The mild voice of peace may soon be succeeded by the tumult of war ; and prudence requires a preparation for every event.

Should any unforeseen disaster interrupt the tranquillity of our country, *you* may be called upon to take an active part in the conflict. In the event of war, our exposed, and hitherto defenceless shores, will again be open to the ravages of a plundering enemy ; and we may have occasion to congratulate ourselves in the possession of a military corps, which will be forward in the place of danger, and formidable in the field of fight.

Already, within our memory, has the ground o'er which you have marched, witnessed the approach of American forces ; but, that circumstance will never form an honourable trait in the history of our country. Should a second conflict call forth *your* exertions, I trust the name of Penobscot will be rescued from dishonour, and history not be ashamed to admit it within her pages.

Fellow-Citizens, we are now in the perfect possession

possession of peace, independence, and good government. May our gratitude to Heaven be equal to the favours bestowed ; may our conduct be such as to ensure permanence to these blessings. And when we have acted well our parts in this transitory stage, may we transmit those inestimable privileges, pure and unimpaired, to latest posterity.

T H E E N D.



